

Europe needs a Young Farmers' Check

Who are we?

Groene Kring and NAJK are the young farmers organisations from Flanders (Belgium) and The Netherlands. Both organisations unite and represent young farmers in their regions. Young farmers are underrepresented in their sector and are subjected to all kinds of risks. Both our organisations are led by young farmers, longstanding members of CEJA and representing more than 10.000 members combined. Thus, we can say that we are shaping the voice of the future of agriculture in our regions.

In both member states less than 10% of all farmers are under the age of 40 (Eurostat). On top of that less than 15% of farmers above 50 have an available successor for the family farm. If there's still a future foreseen for agriculture, young farmers need to be heard.

What's the problem?

The Habitats Directive orders member states to set up a network of special areas of conservation and to establish conservation measures. The way in which our governments are forming local legislation will have irreparable consequences for the farming sector. There will be very few farmers who'll still manage to ensure a fair income from their agricultural activities. Another result of our local legislation will be the hampering of generational renewal. Nobody will start their career as a farmer anymore.

Furthermore, active young farmers won't be able to futureproof their farms in order to answer to upcoming challenges such as climate change, environmental pollution, food insecurity or animal welfare. We'll move right into a full licensing stop. We cannot afford to lose a generation of farmers in the European Union.

Some relevant examples

A young farmer in the Netherlands is currently milking 100 cows. Those cows are being fed by extensive grazing, local barley and maize grown by the young farmer himself. The produced milk, processed into cheese, is the main source of the family's income. The ammonia emitted through the air can hamper special areas of conservation as defined by the Habitats Directive. This farm has an impact of only 2% of the potential total harm on the special area of conservation. Nevertheless, the Dutch government has decided all farms should reduce their cattle by 30%. The young farmer in questions has to continue his farm with only 70 cows. With no changes to his fixed costs, his income will be reduced by more than 30%. Only two options remain: give up the family farm or continue a non-viable business.

A young farmer in Belgium wants to take over the pig farm at home where 150 sows and their piglets are kept and grown. To continue the take-over, investments and loans were necessary. These investments would not only ensure a viable farm but would also pave the way for investing in animal welfare or environmental protection. Due to the local implementation of the Habitats Directive all pig farmers must replace existing barns by new ones in the next couple of years while being prohibited of growing in ammonia-output. This means that this young farmer will be obliged to invest more than initially planned, take bigger loans whilst not being allowed to adjust the pig herd based on the required investments. This makes it impossible to pay off the required loans. This young farmer decided to pursue another career.

These are just two examples of what young and future farmers are nowadays facing in our countries. These examples are not isolated. On the contrary, they're omnipresent amongst young farmers.

Is there a solution?

As young farmers, we know we will need to adapt to plenty of upcoming challenges. One of these challenges is the favourable conservation status of nature and nature restoration. We believe our generation can lower their emissions and bring natural areas to a favourable conservation status. Through innovation, changing demographics and changing farmers' behavior we will be able to farm in balance with nature and in a sustainable manner.

However, due to the tunnel vision of our governments a lot of young farmers are raising the white flag. The focus on nature conservation and restoration may be necessary but not at the total expense of young farmers. Therefore, the Habitats Directive is in dire need of a socioeconomic **Young Farmers Check**. This Young Farmers Check will assess the impact on young farmers as a result of certain policies. Similar to legislation protecting, conserving or restoring our nature, we need legislation to protect, conserve or restore our farmers.

What can you do?

As an MEP, you serve a fundamental role in this matter. To avoid the same far-reaching impact in other member states as we're experiencing in Flanders and The Netherlands, we need you to:

- Request the European Commission for a socioeconomic **Young Farmers Check** within the Habitats Directive.
- Write and vote a **resolution in the European Parliament** demanding a Young Farmers Check on European policy.
- Make any future policy **with young farmers**, not just about young farmers.

For more information, please contact our organisations:

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